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Erie Times-News

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50¢

WEATHER

Mostly sunny
High: 80 Low: 57
Sunset: 7:16 p.m.
Forecast: 8B



INSIDE



Hostage pleads for his life

A British hostage
appeared on a video
weeping and pleading
for his life as Iraq's
leader and U.S. officials
crushed reports that a
high-profile female Iraqi
weapons scientist
could be released from
jail soon — as
demanded by the
kidnappers.
Up Close, 3A

Crawford district sued

Filipino claims she didn't get teaching job because of her race

By LISA THOMPSON
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MEADVILLE — Rowena Wagner says one thing stands between her and the teaching job she wants in the Crawford Central School District — her race. The school district says Wagner's race did not keep her from a job, more qualified applicants did.

Wagner wants a judge to order the school district to hire her and pay her back pay for the time it barred her from working there. She says that out of a total student enrollment of more than 4,300, the school district has at least 300 students who are minority. But during the last 10 years, the district has employed about two minority teachers and not more than five minority teachers in the last 25 years. She wants the judge to order the district to put into place an affirmative-action plan to force the school district to diversify its teaching staff.

➤ Please see MEADVILLE, 4A

FORENSIC FILES: CORKY



Porter:
Politics
behind
book flap

By KEVIN FLOWERS
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Court TV investigates Corry killing

Continued from 1A

recovered from Copenhaver's computer hard drive the deleted files that outlined the kidnapping plot.

The unusual kind of ammunition used in the crime was found in Copenhaver's house.

The tracks placed Copenhaver's vehicle at the murder scene, said Kaiser, who is here with a cameraman and sound engineer.

The freelance producer, who is from King of Prussia, is producing the segment for Mediaset Television Inc. of Allentown, which provides the program for Court TV. New "Forensic Files" episodes air weekdays at 9 p.m.

Kaiser has spent the past several days talking to Erie County District Attorney Brad Fouk, former Corry Journal reporter Mike Hudson and retired state police Capt. Roger Gregorich. Kaiser said he heard about Copenhaver by accident from Gregorich after contacting the former trooper and handwriting expert about another case. Fouk and Gregorich could not be reached for comment.

Erie County President Judge William Cunningham, who was the district attorney at the time of Copenhaver's trial, was trying to fit in an interview with Kaiser today or Friday. The judge said the "sheer cold-blooded killing" of a defenseless mother makes this case stand out.

"It's one of those cases you never forget," he said.

Cunningham said the case also was significant because of the "powerful evidence."

It included a 22-point plan for the crime that the FBI retrieved after it was deleted from Copenhaver's computer.

"That was developing technology at the time," Cunningham said.

The lead prosecutor in the case said Copenhaver's mistake was that "he believed when he hit the delete button, it automatically deleted the information."

Ernest Wood, a criminal-justice professor at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, said the Corry case involved one of the first attempts at recovering evidence off a computer hard drive.

"Back then, it would have been and was a pretty big thing," said Wood, co-director of the Western Pennsylvania



"Forensic Files" producer Don Kaiser is preparing a Court TV segment on the 1988 murder of Sally Weiner in Corry and the science that caught her killer.

ANOTHER CASE FILE

The Copenhaver case wasn't the only murder that brought the "Forensic Files" show to Erie. A different crew was in town in June to interview Steven Symes, a forensic anthropologist at Erie's Mercyhurst College. The episode of "Forensic Files" featuring Symes will air Wednesday at 9 p.m. on the Court TV cable network. Symes testified in the 2001 Ohio case against John David Smith II, who was convicted of murdering his ex-wife.

High Tech Crime Training Center at Edinboro.

The procedure is much less complex now, he said.

At the time of Copenhaver's trial in 1988, there were questions about the legality of using that kind of evidence.

The case "established the legality of search and seizure of computers and computer hard drives," Wood said.

Dennis Ditzman, director of the applied forensic sciences department at Mercyhurst College, said forensic science is a "critical component" to solving crimes. He said it can link suspects

to scenes and help investigators determine who was there and what happened.

Forensic science is nothing new, Ditzman said. Chemistry and fingerprints have been used in crime solving for decades. But techniques today are even much more sophisticated than at the time Copenhaver killed Weiner.

"We're taking 1988," Ditzman said. "That's light-years away. A lot of things have changed."

One thing that has stayed the same, however, is that a family lost a wife and mother.

Kaiser said Tuesday he has talked to Sally Weiner's widow, Harry Weiner, but they had not set up an interview. Kaiser didn't know if that will change. Weiner couldn't be reached for comment by the Erie Times-News.

"Our purpose is not to reopen old wounds for him," Kaiser said.

The show also made an attempt to reach Copenhaver by sending him a letter in prison.

"We have yet to hear from him," Kaiser said.

DANA MASSING can be reached at 725-5557, 870-1729 or by e-mail.

Details of 1988 murder of Sally Weiner

Sally Weiner was the 37-year-old wife of a Corry banker and the mother of two when she was kidnapped on a Friday

Weiner contacted bank officials and police, and then followed orders to pick up a bag in the bank parking lot that

that detailed Copenhaver's intention to lure Harry Weiner, using treasure-hunt-style notes, and kill him.

Teacher sues school district

Continued from 1A

Superintendent Charles E. Heller III, and the teachers union, the Crawford Central Education Association.

Caleb Nichols, Wagner's lawyer, said Wagner has an exemplary substitute-teaching record, but the district has repeatedly passed over her to hire less-qualified, less-experienced candidates. "We feel that is unfair," he said.

Nichols also said the district's hiring practices should be "opened up and scrutinized."

"The (district) has a terrible employment record with respect to minorities. It didn't just start yesterday. It stretches back over a period of years," he said.

School-district lawyer Richard Perches of Erie called Wagner's claims "nonsense" and said the district will seek to have the complaint dismissed.

He said Wagner was a substitute teacher who applied for a regular full-time position along with hundreds of other qualified candidates. Wagner was "not the best candidate for the job," he said.

"There's nothing more to it." According to the complaint filed by Nichols, Wagner graduated from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania in May 2000 with a bachelor's degree in education, and worked as a substitute teacher in the Crawford Central dis-

trict during the 2001-02 school year.

Wagner claims she was abruptly fired from a long-term substitute position in December 2002 and replaced with a white teacher.

On another occasion, when she applied for a full-time third-grade teaching position, she says, she was told it no longer existed.

She said that between 2002 and 2004, she unsuccessfully applied for more than 75 long-term substitute and full-time permanent teaching positions in the district.

She claims the district hired applicants for long-term substitute positions and full-time teaching positions who were inexperienced and less qualified than she was.

She also says the district made her undergo job interviews for the positions she applied for, while others were hired without such interviews.

She claims that she was denied jobs in retaliation for the complaint she filed with the Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission in February 2003 after she was terminated from the long-term substitute position in December 2002.

Wagner also faults the teachers union for failing to live up to its official commitment to equitable representation of minority employment.

LISA THOMPSON can be reached at 870-1802 or by e-mail.

County reveals it paid to avoid being sued

By ED PALATIELLA

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Erie County government paid a child-welfare caseworker \$100,000 to prevent him from suing the county over a discrimination claim, according to a previously secret agreement that the County Executive Office disclosed on Wednesday.

The agreement shows that the caseworker, David Dows, had filed a charge with the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission over his employment with the Erie County Office of Protection and Youth.

The settlement involved no payouts from the county's insurance agency, according to county financial records.

The county in the past has settled lawsuits to avoid litigation and

the future. "The county in the agreement also allowed Dows to voluntarily resign."

The agreement is dated Aug. 12. Dows signed it along with Erie County Solicitor John Onorato and Deborah Liebel, OCY's executive director. The agreement contains a confidentiality clause that Onorato had said prohibited the county from commenting on the deal.

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